# Using Health Literacy to Improve COVID-19 Health Messaging: Lessons from the COVID-19 Communications Project

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### Introduction



- Effective health messaging has been important throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (Finset et al., 2020).
- However, stakeholders have struggled to communicate complex public health information to the public (Sauer et al., 2021).
- Cultural and health care access differences between rural and urban populations further compound difficulties (Prusaczyk, 2021).



# Phase I





### Methods: Message Set 1

116077-A May 13, 2020 11:00 AM

### **Stop the Spread of Germs**

Help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like COVID-19.





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### Methods: Message Set 2





Type and level of group activity	Low occupancy			High occupancy		
	Outdoors and well ventilated	Indoors and well ventilated	Poorly ventilated	Outdoors and well ventilated	Indoors and well ventilated	Poorly ventilated
Wearing face cove	erings, contact for sh	ort time				
Silent						
Speaking						
Shouting, singing						
Wearing face cove	erings, contact for pr	olonged time				
Silent						
Speaking		*		*		
Shouting, singing						
No face coverings	s, contact for short ti	me				
Silent						
Speaking						
Shouting, singing						
No face coverings	s, contact for prolong	ged time				
Silent						
Speaking						
Shouting,						

# **Participant Characteristics**



- 67 participants
  - St. Louis
    - Public: 27; Providers: 9
  - Bootheel
    - Public: 31
- About half of participants self-identified as Black
  - St. Louis
    - Public: 55%; Providers: 67%
  - Bootheel
    - Public: 42%

- Mean age was in 30s
  - St. Louis
    - Public: 38 years; Providers: 35 years
  - Bootheel
    - Public: 30 years
- Health Literacy Score\*
  - St. Louis Public: 14.5
  - Bootheel Public: 14.2

\*Calgary Charter on Health Literacy Scale, 5 questions on a scale from 1-4, range from 5-20. Higher scores = higher health literacy, we did not collect for providers

![](_page_8_Figure_0.jpeg)

(P23; 1B; STL)

# Phase I Results

![](_page_9_Figure_1.jpeg)

- Common themes but no qualitative differences between the St. Louis Region and the Bootheel
- Participants across groups made suggestions that aligned with health literacy
  - Using clear language and positive emotional appeal
  - Ensuring that the most important images stand out
  - Avoiding cluttered layouts
  - Using colors to attract viewer's attention
  - Including images that represent diverse groups (e.g. race, age, ethnicity, families)
- Healthcare professionals specifically referenced "literacy" or "health literacy"

![](_page_10_Picture_0.jpeg)

# Phase II

# Phase II Timeline

![](_page_11_Figure_1.jpeg)

March – June 2021	<ul> <li>Created 3 new message sets based on Phase I results from open-ended questions and current CDC guidelines</li> </ul>
June - July 2021	<ul> <li>Re-contacted participants for a short survey on new messages</li> </ul>

### Message Set 1: Safe Summer Activities

Questions in plain language for personal choice

![](_page_12_Picture_2.jpeg)

\$ \$

### Message Set 2: Post-Vaccination

# l've been vaccinated against COVID-19.

![](_page_13_Picture_2.jpeg)

You are fully vaccinated 2 weeks after your last dose.

Concise

text

Many people who are around young children or people with certain health conditions want to **keep up what they are doing to stay safe in public:** 

![](_page_13_Picture_5.jpeg)

![](_page_13_Figure_6.jpeg)

![](_page_13_Figure_7.jpeg)

![](_page_14_Figure_0.jpeg)

# Phase II Results

![](_page_15_Figure_1.jpeg)

- 83.1% completion rate
- Overwhelmingly positive response, and the vast majority of participants agreed that we incorporated their feedback into the designs.

I think they get the point across about having fun while also being safe. The colors were bright & vibrant...(P131, STL)

I think the creators used my ideas...because they used words that are understood by the general public... (P270, Bootheel)

![](_page_16_Figure_0.jpeg)

### Lessons Learned

![](_page_17_Figure_1.jpeg)

- Limit health messages to the most important takeaways.
- Images should directly reinforce and enhance the text.
- People wanted trusted and verifiable sources with every message.
- Regional differences in this context may be less important than we hypothesized.
- High response rate for Phase II indicates promise for community engagement.

![](_page_18_Figure_0.jpeg)

# Team: Thank you!

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Slides will be posted to the public at: <a href="https://houstenlab.wustl.edu/">https://houstenlab.wustl.edu/</a>

![](_page_19_Picture_13.jpeg)

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

![](_page_19_Picture_15.jpeg)

![](_page_19_Picture_16.jpeg)

# References

![](_page_20_Figure_1.jpeg)

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